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INTELLIGENCE (TOPS W11-12)

BY JIM ADAMS

WASHINGTON (AP) -- THE FEROCITY OF THE 1968 TET OFFENSIVE IN VIETNAM TOOK U.S. FORCES BY SURPRISE BECAUSE TOP AMERICAN OFFICIALS DELIBERATELY UNDERESTIMATED THE SIZE OF ENEMY FORCES, A FORMER INTELLIGENCE ANALYST SAID TODAY.

SAMUEL A. ADAMS, TESTIFYING BEFORE THE HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE, PRODUCED SECRET CABLES FROM GEN. CREIGHTON ABRAMS, FORMER U.S. COMMANDER IN VIETNAM, AND ELLSWORTH BUNKER, FORMER U.S. AMBASSADOR IN SAIGON.

ADAMS, A FORMER CIA INTELLIGENCE ANALYST, SAID ABRAMS AND BUNKER INSISTED ON KEEPING OFFICIAL ESTIMATES OF VIETCONG TROOP STRENGTH AT ABOUT 300,000, DESPITE INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT INDICATED ENEMY STRENGTH AT ABOUT 600,000.

HE SAID THE FIGURES WERE ALTERED IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THEIR CONTENTION THAT THE VIETCONG WERE DEMORALIZED BY U.S. MILITARY SUCCESSSES.

"ALTHOUGH OUR AIM WAS TO FOOL THE AMERICAN PRESS, THE PUBLIC AND CONGRESS, WE UNINTENTIONALLY SUCCEEDED BEST IN FOOLING OURSELVES," ADAMS SAID.

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THE MISINFORMATION LED TO U.S. MILITARY FORCES, THE CONGRESS AND THE AMERICAN PUBLIC BEING CAUGHT BY SURPRISE AT THE INTENSITY OF THE TET OFFENSIVE, LAUNCHED ON JAN. 30, 1968, ADAMS SAID.

THE TWO CABLES PRODUCED BY ADAMS WERE LISTED AMONG SECRET DOCUMENTS WHICH THE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE HAD SUBPOENAED, BUT NOT RECEIVED, FROM THE FORD ADMINISTRATION.

IN A CABLE DATED AUG. 20, 1967, ABRAMS REPORTED THAT NEW ESTIMATES OF THE SIZE OF VIETCONG FORCES WERE "IN SHARP CONTRAST" TO THE 229,000 FIGURE GIVEN TO THE PRESS. THE CABLE SUGGESTED THAT TWO TROOP CATEGORIES BE DELETED FROM THE ESTIMATES IN ORDER TO RETAIN THE OLD FIGURE.

"WE HAVE BEEN PROJECTING AN IMAGE OF SUCCESS OVER THE RECENT MONTHS," THE ABRAMS CABLE EXPLAINED.

THE CABLE SAID THAT IF THE TRUE NUMBER OF VIETCONG TROOPS BECAME PUBLIC "ALL AVAILABLE CAVETS AND EXPLANATIONS WILL NOT PREVENT THE PRESS FROM DRAWING AN ERRONEOUS AND GLOOMY CONCLUSION.

"ALL THOSE WHO HAVE AN INCORRECT VIEW OF THE WAR WILL BE REINFORCED," THE CABLE SAID, "AND THE TASK WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT."

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